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ABSTRACT

The General Curriculum Regulations of 1969 (effective July 1, 1969) state that there shall be four required units in Social Studies, two of which shall be designated as American or United States Culture, taught as interdisciplinary studies with concepts taken from the various social sciences. Since this section of the regulations has raised a number of questions, this pamphlet attempts to clarify by answering the following: 1) What is meant by American Culture? 2) How may the American Culture courses be made interdisciplinary? 3) Are there suggested ways of organizing American Culture courses? and, 4) What changes in the typical course sequence are indicated by the new regulations? (Author/DJB)

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1970

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Pennsylvania Department of Education
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AMERICAN CULTURE: WHAT? WHY? HOW?

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The General Curriculum Regulations of 1969 state that there shall be four required units in Social Studies, two of which shall be designated as American (U.S.) Culture, taught as interdisciplinary studies with concepts taken from the various social sciences. Since this section of the regulations has raised a number of questions, the following is an attempt at clarification.

WHAT IS MEANT BY AMERICAN CULTURE?

Culture, in this context, means the total way of life in any society. American Culture should be a study of all aspects of American life including behavior patterns, values, beliefs, ideas, and the various institutions we have established. The American Culture course must integrate content and understanding from the social science disciplines of history, economics, geography, anthropology, political science, sociology and psychology. In many instances the auxiliary humanistic disciplines of literature, music, fine arts, et. al. although not specifically required, will provide insight and enrichment.

DOES THIS NEW REGULATION CANCEL THE FORMER AMERICAN HISTORY REQUIREMENT?

The legislative mandate of two years of U.S. and Pennsylvania history and government has not been changed. It has been broadened by an interdisciplinary focus under the name American Culture; this is a more complete implementation of the mandate which stated that the study of U.S. and Pennsylvania history and government shall also emphasize our social, economic and cultural development. (Section 1605, School Laws of Pennsylvania, 1968)

Traditional American History courses and textbooks have tended to stress the political developments catalogued chronologically under each presidential administration. Only minor attention has been given to social history and this has usually been presented in separate units covering a number of administrations.

IS PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY REQUIRED AS A SEPARATE COURSE?

Pennsylvania History, as a separate course, was not required in the past, nor is it required under the present regulations. The legislative mandate (Section 1605) requires only that a study of Pennsylvania shall be included in the secondary curriculum. This gives local districts the option of incorporating this study in the American Culture units, or requiring it as an additional course.

WHAT ABOUT THE 36-HOUR REQUIREMENT IN ECONOMICS?

Since the American Culture courses are required to include economic concepts and understandings, it is not necessary to teach economics or any other social science as a single discipline. Local districts may offer a variety of Social Studies courses according to student needs and staff abilities.

WHY IS THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH REQUIRED?

Any analysis of a culture is inherently interdisciplinary, involving content and approaches from the social and behavioral sciences. Good teachers have always understood the impossibility of competently presenting history without the incorporation of understandings from the other relevant disciplines. Increasing emphasis on this approach reflects a recognition that one of the major objectives of the social studies program - the explanation of human social behavior - cannot be adequately achieved through single-discipline analysis. Students are encouraged to view the totality as well as the multiple influences operative in all human experience. It is hoped that this may result in more meaningful and relevant social studies instruction.

HOW MAY THE AMERICAN CULTURE COURSES BE MADE INTERDISCIPLINARY?

Any period or topic in American history will become more meaningful when clarified by the specialized perspectives of other social science disciplines. For example, one topic generally studied in the period of Jackson's administration is "The Rise of the Common Man". What content from the various social science disciplines might result in a broader understanding and appreciation of the American way of life?

Geography

urban growth at strategic locations for transportation
varied topography and natural resources
development of new regions - West and South

Economics

expansion of agriculture in the new western states
the factory system in New England; employment
opportunities and development of a new labor class
the American free enterprise system

Anthropology-Sociology

social mobility
cultural change
removal of Indians to lands west of the Mississippi
population increase
urbanization
westward migration
immigration - new ethnic and religious groups
reform movements: anti-slavery, prison and mental institutions, temperance, feminism

Political Science

extension of franchise
establishment of free public education
party politics; present Democratic Party founded, spoils system (rotation in office)
government land policy
sectional rivalry

Philosophy-Psychology

status anxiety (New England challenged by new sections)
new ideologies resulting in such social experiments as Brook Farm, Oneida and New Harmony
development of "frontier" psychology

MUST EACH TOPIC INCLUDE CONCEPTS FROM ALL THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?

It would be unrealistic to assume that all of the social sciences can or should be included in the study of each topic in a course. Teachers should select those concepts most appropriate to add new cultural dimensions and perspective to the understanding of each period.

WILL A COURSE IN A SINGLE DISCIPLINE SUCH AS ECONOMICS OR SOCIOLOGY ELIMINATE THE INCLUSION OF CONCEPTS FROM THAT DISCIPLINE IN THE AMERICAN CULTURE COURSES?

Although the regulations provide for the offering of single discipline electives, such courses will not substitute for the prescribed inclusion of that discipline in American Culture studies.

ARE THERE SUGGESTED WAYS OF ORGANIZING AMERICAN CULTURE COURSES?

There are several approaches or organizational patterns which may be used effectively, and the choice depends upon student and teacher interests and abilities. They include the chronological, the topical or thematic, the problems approach or any of these in combination. In the interest of greater relevancy, consideration should be given to new ways of structuring history courses which would constitute a departure from the prevailing emphasis on comprehensive coverage of unrelated facts.

The 39th yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies gives an interesting list of questions which cover the major aspects of United States history and might serve as an integrating structure for the American Culture courses.[1]

1. How did the social structure that the European colonists brought with them change in the course of their life in America?
2. How did Americans develop a sense of nationality?
3. How did Americans develop a more democratic political system?
4. How did the enslavement of Africans produce tension and disruption in American life?
5. How has discrimination against Negroes continued to generate tensions in American life?
6. How have Americans tried to cope with growing concentration in business, labor, agriculture, and other aspects of life?
7. How have Americans been affected by their relations with the rest of the world?
8. Where, in terms of the major historical themes studied, is American society headed today?

ARE THERE APPROPRIATE MATERIALS?

Many of the newer textbooks in American History have been written or revised with an interdisciplinary orientation. It is recommended however that supplementary materials and multi-media resources be used to stimulate inquiry and provide for varied student ability and interest levels. Many

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[1] Becker, James M. "Organizing the Social Studies Program". In Social Studies Curriculum Development: Prospects and Problems. NCSS, Washington, D. C., 1969, p. 93.

paperback series are available and current textbooks contain extensive bibliographies of reference and audio-visual materials.

A few suggestions for supplementary materials are listed on pages 6, 7, 8 and 9.

HOW MAY THE REQUIRED INCLUSION OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUP HISTORY BE IMPLEMENTED IN AMERICAN CULTURES?

Our American Culture is a pluralistic one made up of many ethnic and cultural groups which have contributed to its unique quality and strength. Minority group content should be integrated throughout the American Culture courses - not merely by listing the contributions of outstanding minority group members but by including the varying roles played by different racial and ethnic groups where realistic and appropriate in a study of American society. For example, were the factors which created "Chinatowns" similar to those which created Black Ghettos and barrios in our metropolitan centers? How was the "melting pot" concept a destructive one? Why was our policy toward Japanese Americans during World War II different from that toward other Americans with whose homelands the U.S. was at war?

It is important to correct the mythology surrounding minority groups and to counteract what has been called the "Three D" philosophy of distortion, deletion and denial.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE TYPICAL COURSE SEQUENCE ARE INDICATED BY THE NEW REGULATIONS?

The curriculum sequence existing in a large majority of Pennsylvania schools is the following:

Grade 7 - Geography - Old World Backgrounds
Grade 8 - American History
Grade 9 - Pennsylvania History/Civics
Grade 10 - World Cultures
Grade 11 - American History
Grade 12 - Problems of Democracy/Economics

If a complete revision is not feasible, there are many ways of varying this sequence to comply with the regulations. One possibility might be:

Grade 7 - World Cultures I
Grade 8 - Electives

Grade 9 - American Culture I

Grade 10 - American Culture II

Grade 11 - World Cultures II

Grade 12 - Electives

The two years of unspecified requirements enable local districts to offer a variety of Social Studies courses, and give each discipline an opportunity to be represented in the curriculum. This does not preclude the offering of interdisciplinary electives.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The following is only a sample of the many and varied references which will complement the standard American History textbook in providing a cultural approach.

The Insight Series: Studies in Contemporary Issues.

14 paperbacks on topics of concern to Americans in the last quarter century. Interdisciplinary in approach, they contain primary sources and teaching suggestions. Among the titles are:

Urban Racial Violence in the Twentieth Century

The Welfare State

The Politics and Anti-Politics of the Young

The Oppenheimer Affair

Glencoe Press
8701 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California 90211

Public Issues Series/Harvard Social Studies Project

A series of paperbacks dealing with controversial public issues in American History such as:

Religious Freedom: Minority Faiths and Majority Rule

The Rise of Organized Labor: Worker Security and Employer Rights

Negro Views of America: The Legacy of Oppression

The Immigrant's Experience: Cultural Variety and the 'Melting Pot'

Race and Education

American Education Publications
Education Center
Columbus, Ohio 43216

Problems in American History

Four books of readings which use a problems approach for the entire span of American History. Selections are included from past and present observers of these basic issues, and they are structured around challenging questions. This is a genuine innovation.

Revolution and Response 1607-1825

Change and Progress 1820-1900

Power and Prosperity 1898-1929

Challenge and Promise 1930 to present

John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
605 Third Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Feder, Bernard. Viewpoints U.S.A.

A series of problems in American History; primary source materials and instructional techniques illustrate the inductive approach. Projects for further research and a specialized bibliography accompany each topic. Individual problems are available in separate pamphlets. Sample titles include:

"How Democratic was Jacksonian Democracy?"

"What Direction for the Negro in America?"

"The United States Commitment to the Free World: How Far Should We Go?"

American Book Company
300 Pike Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Curti, Merle, et. al. eds. American Issues: The Social Record. Two volumes, paperback.

A compilation of "speeches, reports, pamphlets, letters, autobiographies" which bring additional insights to the study of dominant issues in our society.

J. B. Lippincott
East Washington Square
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19105

Problems in American History

Six volumes of source materials organized around a significant issue of American society. Each volume contains 15 Problems which may be used individually or in units of five. Titles include:

The Causes of War

The Negro in America

Labor in American Society

The Supreme Court in American Life

The Social Setting of Intolerance

Reform in America

Scott Foresman and Company
1900 East Lake Avenue
Glenview, Illinois 60025

Lincoln Filene Center Secondary Social Studies Program

A series of seven curriculum programs which focus on various aspects of citizenship education. These are structured around affective behavioral objectives, and are designed primarily as supplementary to the existing curriculum. Each program includes a variety of multi-media experiences as well as a Teacher's Guide. Among the titles are:

"Dimensions of Citizenship"

"Politics and Policy Making"

"Urban Problems and Prospects"

Lincoln Filene Center
Tufts University
Medford, Massachusetts 02155

New Dimensions in American History

A series of paperbacks produced by the Amherst Project designed to develop new materials for use in teaching history and social studies, utilizing the discovery learning approach. Sample titles:

States' Rights and Indian Removal

The 1920's: A Study in American Values

The Negro Struggle for Equality in the Twentieth Century

D. C. Heath & Company
475 South Dean Street
Englewood, New Jersey 07631

Zenith Books

These are multi-group paperbacks which focus on American minorities and their contributions to our society. Designed especially for "reluctant readers", they are valuable for all students in providing an appreciation of our pluralistic heritage. Among the titles are:

Passage to the Golden Gate: A History of the Chinese in America to 1910

South By Southwest: The Mexican-American and His Heritage

The Quiet Rebels: Four Puerto Rican Leaders

Doubleday-Zenith
501 Franklin Avenue
Garden City, New York 11530